

Comments and Responses ARC 7129B

Rule Summary

Allows the Senior Living Coordinating Unit (SLCU) to appoint workgroups to research and make recommendations on issues to be considered by the SLCU and reduces the number of required meetings per year.

Comment Period

September 10, to October 1, 2008

The following individuals and organizations provided the written comments below:

Di Findley, Iowa Caregivers Association (ICA)
Bob Welsh, Citizen

Comment: The ICA appreciates the opportunity to comment on this important topic, and looks forward to the conversation within the SLCU about the pros and cons of reducing meeting frequency from six to four meetings annually.

As we think about the issue of meeting frequency, we conclude that frequency is not the real issue. The real issue that needs to be addressed is that of the purpose for the SLCU and what the meetings have the *potential* to accomplish. This is what we hope the SLCU will give its focus to. The answer to the purpose and potential questions will make the answer to the meeting frequency issue much more obvious.

As a regular attendee at Unit meetings for several years, we agree that some type of change is necessary. Meetings have been poorly attended. Legislators rarely participate. Meeting agendas have been primarily focused on report-getting vs. issue-discussing. There has been little time or interest in engaging members, or the audience, in substantive and interesting discussion about current problems and ways to collaborate regarding them. While there has been a compilation of activities and a matrix which has attempted to track them, there have been no prioritized “goals” for the SLCU and no routine conversation about whether those goals are being met, or what to do if they are not being met.

Our view is this: we believe that the SLCU was envisioned to be a collaborative body that would create and act on a collective agenda. We do not believe that the collective agenda would REPLACE the individual agenda of a Department. Rather, the COLLECTIVE agenda would identify those issues that the Departments had in common and would work on together to achieve in the best interest of the Iowans they serve. (Our view is reinforced by looking at Governor Vilsack’s Executive Order #37 of 12/31/06 which created the Aging Services Cabinet; in his mind a need existed to expand coordination and – in the words of the E.O. – “integration of health and social services for older Iowans across state government.” We agree with that objective.)

We've always felt that the key to a collective agenda was the existence of a plan that reflected the interests and priorities of the SLCU. That "plan" does not need to be something that takes nine months to a year to create and edit; it could be something as simple as a statement of principles and a workplan that flows from it. The workplan could be updated every year and tracked and discussed at every meeting. If success had occurred, celebration should happen. If workplan items had been delayed or somehow bottled up, then the meetings would serve the purpose of strategizing and assigning action. That workplan could then serve as the basis for the year-end report.

The process now underway to identify 2009 recommendations could be the vehicle to develop such a workplan. Recommendations could be voted on and prioritized by the members, the priorities could have actions assigned and timeframes designated, and those priorities could be discussed at periodic meetings as a focus for the agenda. If that would become the case, meetings would serve a more valuable purpose....particularly just before and during the legislative session.

(We empathize with Department Directors. Time for meetings is tough to fit in, and when meetings occur, they need to be effective. The reality is that meetings primarily to exchange reports and information can be replaced by e-mail. The face to face meetings serve a valuable purpose when there is meaningful dialogue about specific "TO DO" items and the priorities on the collective agenda.)

We value the SLCU and believe that collaboration and integration are important means that help achieve the end – with the "end" being enhanced services to Iowans. But we also recognize that Department Directors can't do this alone; they need key legislators to be actively and routinely engaged and helping to identify and drive the agenda.

Bottom line: If legislative interest can be expanded and if the Unit can shift its focus to collective planning and collective action, then we feel strongly that six meetings a year are desirable. If, however, the meetings will remain as is, then we agree that four meetings will be ample, and possibly too many.

Response: The rule changes do not address the SLCU mission or meeting processes. The proposed reduction in the number of meetings each year is due to scheduling conflicts that do not permit some members to attend six meetings.

Comment: I write to express the hope that the Commission of Elder Affairs will not approve changing 321-16.4 (21, 231, 249H) Meeting.

It is my firm belief as Vice-Chair of the Senior Living Coordinating Unit that we need MORE not less coordination.

To reduce the minimum number of meetings gives the wrong message, it moves the SLCU in the wrong direction.

I trust that the Commission of Elder Affairs will examine the duties of the SLCU. I believe the Commission will agree that these duties, if taken seriously, require more than four meetings a year.

If Iowa is going to have an effective long-term care system it will require that the Directors of the Departments of Elder Affairs, Human Services, Public Health and Inspection and Appeals sit down together to discuss and coordinate plans.

In the best interest of seniors please do not support the idea that it is acceptable for the members of the SLCU to meet less often.

Response: The proposed reduction in the number of meetings each year is due to scheduling conflicts that do not permit some members to attend six meetings. Without a quorum, no action can be taken on items before the SLCU. The goal of holding quarterly meetings, rather than meeting every other month, is to increase membership attendance so action may be taken on issues related to long-term care that are under the charge of the SLCU.